



Young People's Rights Review

Rebecca Craig MSYP - Freedom of Speech

I have had contact with about 100 people regarding Freedom of Expression through social media and various continuous surgeries organized throughout the year.

The Oxford dictionary defines freedom as

“The power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants.”

What catches my attention here is the complete liberation for a person to exist exactly how they please, flaws and all. Relating to the UNCRC article 13 and 14, as well as ECHR articles 9 and 10 in relation to the freedom of expression.

After consultation with my constituents I found that they couldn't identify any positive developments in the past 3 years and there is definitely a belief that what we coin the freedom of expression is actually the freedom to conform. In response to the survey my constituents completed one left a comment saying 'If you say anything in an academic or public setting that people don't like you get shunned.' This statement mirrored the opinion of many of my constituents.

Now, I accept that this is an isolated example but as a young person of faith this silencing is part of my life - I can accept other people not believing but I have been condemned by workplaces by the call for people to not be allowed to wear crosses, schools by arguing the Christian faith should not be taught in schools but other religions should be and by my peers in assuming my opinions are all fuelled by my religion and somehow are less valuable. And in many ways, it is the same in my experience as a woman in physics except opposed to religious views it is my gender that devalues my contribution in some cases.

In consultation with my constituents it became obvious many felt discouraged from sharing their faith since it isn't popular opinion, some even felt like they couldn't have a strong opinion because they were male more so than because of their faith. Worryingly 65% said they felt as though in social situations they couldn't share their own opinions on matters, sadly this remains 65% in educational or professional settings from fear of ostracisation, marginalisation or embarrassment from teachers and peers alike.

I'd like to draw your attention to Children and Young People's Rights Action Plan section 1.7 to 'further raise awareness of children's rights, including amongst children and young people themselves', **I propose this is developed to ensure the full education and training of children, young people, teachers, service providers, the media and other stakeholders in freedom of expression. This extends to a further action on a more comprehensive plan for Human Rights education and training, as recommended in paragraph 73 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's 2016 review of the UK.**

This is of utmost importance to the people I represent to allow a safe environment as well as to protect our right to practice our religion and the freedom to express ourselves for religious purposes or not.

SYPs call is specific to educating children and young people to be empowered in their rights and as such this should be included explicitly in any legislation.